

Thinking with Robert Sokolowski about phenomenology and personalism

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Abstract

Robert Sokolowski wishes to provide what he calls “glimpses” that provide essential philosophical clarifications regarding the nature of the human person, whom the author also calls “the agent of truth.” He claims that our rationality constitutes us as human persons and wishes to explain such rationality in action to reveal its existing manifestations. He calls for epistemic modesty, pointing out our inability to fully understand the mystery of human personhood. Our article reflects on the way Sokolowski approaches the study of what constitutes the human person, underlining his preference for basing his ideas on dissecting distinct human activities, which helps us identify how human rationality and personhood manifest themselves. We further reflect on what Sokolowski means by emphasizing that human rationality is “essentially a disclosure of things” as opposed to the ability to note, describe, evaluate and/or infer ideas in your brains. Finally, we argue that to understand what constitutes the human person, we must take into account the human essential relationality and openness to the other/Other.

Key words: Personalism, the meaning of life, Robert Sokolowski, Phenomenology of the person

1 Introduction

Robert Sokolowski (1934-) is a Roman Catholic priest and an internationally recognized philosopher whose areas of expertise are phenomenology, philosophy of language, the relationship between reason and Christian faith, and the philosophical legacy of Aristotle. Sokolowski is a relatively prolific author with dozens of scientific articles published in highly regarded academic journals and several monographs that have won him international acclaim. Among these, “Christian Faith and Human Understanding” (2006) is on the borderline between epistemology, theology, and philosophy of religion, while his two other major works – “Introduction to Phenomenology” (2000) and “Phenomenology of the Human Person” (2008) – are related directly to phenomenology in general and the human person in phenomenological perspective in particular.

Sokolowski wishes to provide what he calls “glimpses” that “clarify, philosophically, what human persons are.” His whole life work revolves around this topic, to which he has made significant contributions. Sokolowski claims, among other things, that “it is our rationality that makes us persons, and wishes to describe such rationality in action, to show how it is made manifest.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 7) He also reminds us that we must maintain a certain modesty as we discuss the human person because “we will always remain mysterious to ourselves.” This appeal to modesty is, indeed, in order, as a unilateral emphasis on rationality presents its own problems and pitfalls, which we will uncover in the latter part of our paper. Sokolowski tries to confront some of these challenges, however. Instead of “offering broad, abstract descriptions,” he “targets a particular human activity, that is, a special way in which we use the word I and its variants, a special way we use the first person, when we speak. Our rationality and hence our personhood come prominently to light in this usage. This phenomenon can then help us explore other ways in which our rationality appears.” (Sokolowski,

2008: 7) In this paper, we wish to reflect critically on Sokolowski's notion that "our rationality is not simply the power to have ideas, to calculate, and to draw inferences in our minds; our rationality is essentially a disclosure of things. ... Our treatment of the human person must also study the appearance of things, and all of this will begin with a treatment of the way we use the word I." (Sokolowski, 2008: 7-8) In addition, we argue that to understand what constitutes the human person, we must take into account the human essential relationality and openness to the other/Other.

2 Exploring the 'Catholic Heritage' of Sokolowski

As a Catholic theologian, Sokolowski owes much of his education and a general understanding of the world of philosophy to his Catholic intellectual tradition, most notably to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). Thomistic personalism stresses the metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality, which Sokolowski was so interested in. He especially appreciated Maritain's work on this subject because of Maritain's ability to separate St. Thomas' personalist doctrine from the modern renderings of personalism that focus more on the individual's good. A genuine social philosophy, according to both Maritain and Sokolowski, must always be centered in the dignity of the human person and not "in the primacy of the individual and the private good." (Maritain, 1985: 13) Sokolowski's critical view of modern individualism was, in many respects, prophetic. He disdained the modern self-absorption of the 'Self' in the Self's desperate search for meaning and significance and warned about dire consequences for the human Self's well-being as well as for the society's cohesion, stability, and safety. We see the same fear in a rising number of sociologists and social ethicists of the present who warn about the potentially detrimental effects of excessive individualism. Some of these effects, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim point out, are already tangible in our societies: "As modernity gains ground, God, nature and the social system are being progressively replaced, in greater and lesser steps, by the individual – confused, astray, helpless and at a loss. With the abolition of the old coordinates a question arises that has been decried and acclaimed, derided, pronounced sacred, guilty and dead: the question of the individual." (Beck – Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 9). It was this 'confusion' and 'lostness' of the modern individual that Sokolowski strived to address in his own personalist reflections, balancing the emphasis on the uniqueness and irreplaceable dignity of every human individual with the contrasting emphasis on one's relatedness and responsibility to the other (and the society). On this topic, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) had the most palpable influence on the American Catholic thinker.

The very foundational 'personalist' thesis of Maritain was that "the human person is ordained directly to God as to its absolute ultimate end." (Maritain, 1985: 15) This direct ordination of the human person to God "transcends every created common good - both the common good of the political society and the intrinsic common good of the universe." Thomism wants to make sure that "the personal contact of all intellectual creatures with God, as well as their personal subordination to God, be in no way interrupted. Everything else, the whole universe and every social institution must ultimately minister to this purpose; everything must foster and strengthen and protect the conversation of the soul, every soul, with God." (Maritain, 1985: 16) The notion of Divine Providence may be legitimately inferred from this principle: God is in control of the universe and things are happening under his providential rule with the aim to bring the human persons back into an intimate relationship with Him. In a way, we might say that this is why the universe continues to exist. This is in stark contrast to the Graeco-Arabian necessitarianism. Humans are "willed and governed for their own sakes," even as they are ordained "to the perfection of the created whole." (Maritain, 1985: 17) We may be the constitutive parts of the Universe, but the primary goal of our existence is to find joy in our relatedness to God. The relatedness of human persons to the divine, Transcendent Whole, predisposes them to be related in

the proper way to the common good of the Universe, that is, the created realm. Being a theistic philosopher, Maritain stresses that what distinguishes humans from other living creatures is the fact that we can find God's image solely in intellectual creatures alone, i.e., in humans who are constituted as intellectually capable persons. Furthermore, if it is true that the intellectual creature alone bears the image of God, thus the human person alone is capable of grace. The notion of grace points us beyond the immanent frame of this world towards transcendence; this is so because "the free act of the human person, considered in its pure and secret intimacy as a free act, is not of this world. By its liberty/freedom, the human person transcends the stars and all the world of nature." (Maritain, 1985: 20)

Sokolowski picks up on this notion and claims that what we find in the human heart and soul is the intersection, the very meeting point and glorious convergence of eternity and temporality. On the other hand, he is critical regarding the static nature of Thomistic thinking, contrasting the approach of the so-called 'process (historical) ontology' with the more 'essentialist ontology' of the Thomistic tradition. Our notion of person is merely an interpretative model that helps us in our search for human mutuality. It is here where we ask some of the most essential questions: What do we have in common as humans, regardless of our metanarratives? How do we share in the phenomenon of personality when we have different religions/cultures? Where Sokolowski seems to point us to is the realization that we share in the phenomenon of personality essentially and existentially when we start asking questions of transcendence (immediate and ultimate). Hence the unavoidable need to aspire for a life of transcendence, going beyond our immediate needs, earthly loves, and actual impulses.

3 Sokolowski's Phenomenology of the Human Person

Sokolowski published his seminal book *Phenomenology of the Human Person* in 2008 after decades of studies and critical reflections on the topic. His book quickly received international acclaim, as well as criticism from those standing on the opposite side of the philosophical spectrum. (e.g., Trabbic, 2018) It builds on his previous work, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000), in which the author offers his mature reflections on human perception, imagination, language, and memory (among other things), underscoring that human thinking arises inevitably from experience. Sokolowski further deals with questions of personal identity in this book, analyzing how one's identity emerges in and is established through time. His life's project is the explain how the phenomenological approach to reality differs from current postmodern (and even modern) forms of thinking. Among other things, he offers a new understanding of the correspondence theory of truth to substantiate his main arguments philosophically.

Sokolowski's main thesis in his *Phenomenology of the Human Person* revolves around the notions of the human person as "an agent of truth" and the corresponding notion of "veracity" – which Sokolowski considers essential to human personhood – as well as the so-called "declarative speech event" as a foundational disclosure of the human person's essence. He shows modesty in his approach, as he does not "intend to prove that human beings are specifiable in this way (what sort of premises could I use?), but rather to describe, analytically, what our engagement in truth means." (Sokolowski, 2008: 8) Such epistemological modesty is refreshing.

He starts out by distinguishing three key terms that humans use to refer to themselves within the Western philosophical milieu: (1) human beings (or men/mankind, in a more general sense); (2) persons; (3) selves (I/me). Elaborating on these terminological distinctions, Sokolowski notes that "The first term, man or human being, is the most basic and spontaneous. It simply marks us out as one of the species of things in the world, one among the many kinds of being. ...The term person is

more sophisticated, and arose in conjunction with theological and legal controversies.” And the third is “the philosophically contrived self, or the ego, or the I.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 8-9)

The first problem, according to Sokolowski, arises from the seemingly exclusive stance that the human agents have assumed when judging who/what can have the personal quality of an “I”. We are confronted here by the question of metaphysical arrogance: “Why do we presume to take ourselves as ‘the selves,’ the paradigms of identity?”, asks Sokolowski. “We seem to claim for ourselves alone the identity that belongs to all beings.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 9) Sokolowski invokes Boethius’ definition, according to which a person is an individual substance of a rational nature, that is, a person is an individual being that is endowed with reason. Thus angels can be considered persons because they are “individual entities invested with a rational nature.” Furthermore, “in the legal context, there can be ‘persons’ like corporations and states, which are entities that have a standing in the law and are recognized as responsible agents.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 9) Sokolowski’s rational conception of the human person implies that the dignity he/she (the human person) has and the respect he/she deserves stems from one’s rationality. (Sokolowski, 2008: 10) First, he analyzes certain phenomena and certain activities that manifest human persons as such. Then he tries to deal with certain problems or perplexities that block our understanding of human persons.

Sokolowski’s statement that “our rationality is exhibited and our personhood is made manifest in our very ability to use the first-person pronoun” (Sokolowski, 2008: 10) appears to be his main thesis in this section of the book. He points out that there are two different ways in which we use the term “I”. “First, there is what Sokolowski calls the informational use of the word I, in which we simply name ourselves as we would name any other object.” The second use, to so-called “declarative” use of “I”, however, is more important to establishing the agency of our personhood. Statements using the declarative form of the word I, “are not merely reports about myself, as some kind of informational remarks; ...this usage of the term I expresses me, the speaker, as a rational agent and hence as a person or an agent of truth. Moreover, it expresses me as acting rationally here and now, in my present use of the word I.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 10-11) The significance of such reasoning is predicated upon the primacy of immediate experience. Hence it is not important what one says but rather how and in what context one says it. Sokolowski uses a fitting example of a declarative statement to illustrate his point. He points out that “the declarative, ‘I distrust you,’ institutes or reasserts distrust, while the informational merely tells you of it. The declarative appropriates, whereas the informational reports.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 12) Such statements clearly do not predicate the rational agency of those uttering the statements. Instead, they serve as direct expressions of rational and volitional agents. It is important to realize that in third-person statements, the speaker does not directly mention one’s Self, which is a peculiar but also rather significant “absence” of agency. As Sokolowski (2008: 13) explains, “When I use I as a declarative, I explicitly manifest myself in the act of manifesting the world. I catch myself in the act of disclosure and display myself in the act, and this manifesting, which brings me to light as an agent of truth, is different from the original manifesting, the ground-based manifestation, which brings something in the world to light but still leaves me in the shadows.” The disclosure of the speaking human agent is more complex and robust through this kind of declarative statements. Not only does a statement of this sort reveal my rational activity, but it also reveals my art and level of involvement in the activity.

The agent’s self-expression through declarative statements, however, reveals a possible hermeneutical problem. Sokolowski realizes that this point needs to be clarified. “I stand ‘outside’ the world when I show up something in the world, just as the seeing eye stands outside the field of vision. I necessarily could not be part of

what I show up through my power of thoughtful disclosure, and this necessity is akin to logical necessity” – which Sokolowski calls “transcendental logic.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 13-14)

Unfortunately, this hermeneutical problem continues to haunt us as we further reflect on Sokolowski’s phenomenological approach. Phenomena are not “presented” to the Self; they are perceived by the thinking, feeling, desiring, loving, fearing Self (a self-aware subject). Our state of mind influences the way we perceive external phenomena. In any case, if it is true that the declarative statement expresses the thinking subject’s inner state of mind, it would reduce truth to psychology, and our statements would have no real significance in any human conversation, let alone public discourse. Declarative speech gives us much more than useless information regarding someone’s state of mind. It is the expression of primary intuition (actual presence), rational faculty (actual exercise), and the original distinction of a person. The human person discloses something to the outside world as an exercise of the ‘agent of truth’s reason. (Mansini, 2016) More essentially, as Sokolowski observes, “Opening the new dimension gives us a glimpse into what Kant called the kingdom of ends; it is the domain of persons, the space of reasons, the place where we see agents of truth carrying out the things that they do. ... The declarative use of speech ... captures and expresses me, the rational agent, right in the actual exercise of my reason. It is time-specific and indexical ... It exhibits me exercising my power to be truthful.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 15)

Naturally, declarative statements must be more carefully distinguished from statements disclosing one’s self-consciousness. There is no doubt that our self-consciousness is linked to the emergence of articulated thinking. In addition, there is no conclusive separation between our sensual perception and the Self’s self-awareness. But Sokolowski wishes to promote the idea that there is something more in the human mind than the processing of the outer stimuli, connecting them with the structured experiences nascent to our memory and making declarative statements as human subjective expressions of their state of consciousness (i.e., the psychological reduction of the said phenomenon). Instead, Sokolowski introduces the key element in his system, which is the notion of “*veracity*.”

Veracity is the human inclination to attain the truth of things. To put it in Sokolowski’s words, “Veracity is the impulse toward truth, and the virtue of truthfulness is its proper cultivation. ... Veracity means practically the same thing as rationality, but it brings out the aspect of desire that is present in rationality, and it has the advantage of implying that there is something morally good in the fulfillment of this desire. It also suggests that we are good and deserving of some recognition simply because we are rational.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 20) These are potent thoughts with the potential to mobilize the self’s striving to live in the truth and affirming the foundational notion of human dignity and value. The last sentence in the quoted text raises some questions, however. Is it truly so self-evident that humans are good and deserving recognition “simply because we are rational?” It may be valid in Sokolowski’s world, a world intentionally open to transcendence, a world permeated by some overarching Truth of being. On the other hand, if we reject this kind of metaphysical framework, it ceases to be conclusively clear how rationality can be equated with goodness/worthiness unless we apply some arbitrary crafted standard made by rational human agents (who merely wish to affirm the validity of their existence). The counterargument is that unless we stay ontologically open to transcendence, we can neither find nor conclusively define any foundation for human dignity and value. It is against this ominous danger that Sokolowski makes “the leap of faith” into linking rationality with veracity as the undeniable expression of an intrinsic human inclination to attain the truth of things (including one’s own being). This is why he can say that “failing to develop our veracity is not just one of the ways

we can be unsuccessful as human beings; it is the way in which we fail and make ourselves false, that is, unreal as what we are.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 21) To elaborate further on this essential idea, Sokolowski adds that “Veracity is the Eros involved with rationality.” Indeed, “we are persons because we are rational, but our rationality is not merely a skill in finding things out; it also involves the desire to possess truth” – and it is precisely this longing, this unquenchable human desire to possess truth, to be in the Truth, that makes us human persons with inalienable dignity. “It is in us because of what we are, not because we have chosen it. It would be incoherent to say that it arises as the outcome of a choice... We are made human by it, and it is there in us to be developed well or badly. Our exercises of it are indicated by the declarative use of the first-person pronoun.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 21)

It is clear that for Sokolowski, freedom becomes a function of human veracity, this mysterious, intrinsic inclination to truth. Genuine freedom is thus divested from the fateful arbitrariness of humanly conceived freedom as the ability to choose whatever seems to suit one’s wishes. Instead, genuine freedom represents here the ability to choose what is the best for the agent making a choice. Sokolowski’s optimism regarding the connection of freedom and veracity reflects Socrates’ fundamental optimism regarding the link between knowledge and goodness. (Flynn, 2017) We can notice it in the following statement: “If we love the truth, then when we attempt to determine the future, we will be moved to deliberate truthfully, that is, to consider carefully all the realistic alternatives.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 27)

To summarize Sokolowski’s arguments, we can say the following: (1) the animal side of our being (our innate ‘animality’) disposes us to live in (a) awareness of things; (b) to have feelings based on such awareness; (c) to enact the mobility provoked by such feelings and awareness of the outer world. (2) It is the faculty of reason (unique to humans among all other living things on earth) that elevates awareness into thinking, feelings into emotions, and mobility into acts of will. Reason enables us to step beyond the basic perception of the outside environment into an intentionally articulated world. Reason further makes it possible for us to “declare ourselves” as intentional, rational agents in all our activities. We can now speak and act in our “ego,” the “I” of a rational agent. “We live in a kingdom of ends, which is opened up to us by the rationality that makes us human.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 27)

The tool that truly opens up the human mind by cultivating its practical intellect is linguistic syntax, according to Sokolowski. It allows humans to think in an articulated manner. Whereas in its formal structure, linguistic syntax gives rise to logic, the practical syntax makes it possible for our desires and actions to arise and be processed by our thinking “I”. (Weigel, 2016)

Sokolowski then goes through other related topics that he weaves into a complex and holistic narrative of his phenomenological understanding of the human person. He devotes his thoughts to the relationship human physiological constitution to sensing and knowing; he deals with representationalism and physicalism as part of the wider epistemological discourse. He also turns his attention to picturing and imagining; he compares human action with wishing; he elaborates on human ends, intentions, and consequences; describes the difference between art and fiction; introduces the existing types of narrative voice; he analyzes Aristotle’s use of “likenesses” in linguistics and epistemology but also “the use of ‘similitudes’ in the medievals’ metaphysics of knowledge.” (Flynn, 2010: 324) Interestingly, Sokolowski perceives even art and poetry as vehicles of truth expression, believing that they, too, are syntactically structured.

A recent analysis of Sokolowski’s personalist phenomenology by Flynn (2010) correctly summarizes that his *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (2008) “is clearly Husserlian while simultaneously echoing Aristotle and the classical tradition developed up through the Middle Ages and beyond.” (Flynn, 2010: 325) Sokolowski managed to bring together a vast wealth of philosophical knowledge, representing

both the continental and analytic traditions, and connect this knowledge with other disciplines, namely psychology, linguistics, and neurobiology. Also noticed by Flynn is Sokolowski's new departure point in the process of the emergence of human personhood: "we start with others' conversations, into which we are drawn, and then, as we enter into the conversation and it enters into us, we gather and perform predications that lead us up to understanding essentials." (Flynn, 2010: 325) As Sokolowski emphasizes, "none of our thinking is without an element of recapitulation," (Sokolowski, 2008: 78; for a similar reasoning, see: Oakeshott, 1991: 488-541) i.e., a subconscious re-living the conversations we were part of as our personhood was shaped since our early days. This contrasts the typical Husserlian (and modern) starting point of an isolated thinking self. (cf. Husserl, 1973; Smith, 2018: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>; Williams – Bengtsson, 2020) Also important is to note that when Sokolowski speaks of rationality being the very essence of the human person, he does not understand rationality in a narrow sense – as procedural rationality – but rather in a wider sense that includes other forms of understanding that are located outside of language. This comes as no surprise to us, given the act that Sokolowski is an essentialist. All things of this world, seen from Sokolowski's perspective, "have and reveal their intelligibilities, and persons can grasp and articulate these intelligibilities." (Flynn, 2010: 328) Humans are invited to explore the insight into the essence of their surrounding world and themselves in it as agents of truth. They are able to do it precisely by the tool that makes them rational persons – linguistic syntax. By exercising their linguistic capability, they get a glimpse of the essence of things by making their perceptions more precise, more tangible, more intelligible and coherent. (Alweiss, 2009: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=15487>) A purposeless experience of the world thus changes into intentional dwelling in the world. Human persons have a dialectical relationship to the world – they are neither completely detached from it, nor utterly emerged in it, as they exercise their linguistic capacities. There is always the dimension of truth seeking and also the dimension of responsibility. This is precisely why "ideological regimes attack the human person to disable agency and responsibility." (Taylor, 2019: 276) Sokolowski's intellectual legacy on the question of moral ontology of the human person may serve as an antidote against various kinds of ideological totalitarianisms (see a good analysis by Lacey (2013: 51-73), offering "five core ideas of a moral ontology: well-being, virtue, freedom, responsibility, and phronesis" that could help against the ongoing degradation of the human person in the present).

4 Concluding Critical Remarks

Much of what Sokolowski asserts can be welcomed as a fresh phenomenological approach to understanding the human person. For Sokolowski, philosophy is much more than a logical analysis or description of idioms. Philosophy has a deeper purpose and is connected with the unquenchable human thirst for finding the truth of being. There is no strict separation between the phenomena and the human mind; hence there is no pre-syntactic realm that would fundamentally alienate reality from the human thinking agent. As Flynn correctly observes, "Both the logical syntax of the proposition and the grammatical syntax of the sentence are lenses for ontological syntax," which unlocks "the part-whole structures of the world for us." (Flynn, 2010: 330) Especially instructive seems to be his incorporation of will/intention and action/practice into our being rational in the declarative sense. So, even if the achievement of truth defines us as human beings, this process is not limited to purely cognitive activities. Also important, indeed, essential to Sokolowski's main argument is his insistence on incorporating veracity into human rationality. This is in stark contrast to the typical 'modern' philosophical notion of rationality. "While today

‘rationality’ or ‘reason’ might connote an undirected ability to calculate, ‘veracity’ names this dimension of us as a vector” (Flynn, 2010: 336), showing us the direction of our truth-seeking pilgrimage.

There are some questions, however, regarding Sokolowski’s emphasis on the rational dimension of the human person. While we understand his basic reasoning and see most of his explanations as legitimate, we find it difficult to reconcile what may appear as a unilateral emphasis on human *ratio* in defining the essence of the human person. This may be seen as contradictory to recent findings in psychiatry, evolutionary psychology, and psychology in general, where more emphasis is placed on the *animal* (affective, instinctive) side of the human person. The following claim betrays Sokolowski’s preference for the primacy of the rational over affectional: “Strictly speaking, therefore, I do not primarily declare my hatred or love, but the detestability or loveableness of my target. ... It is the rational part of the attitude, rather than the emotional turbulence, that cuts the deepest.” (Sokolowski, 2008: 23) We can see here that rational judgment comes first; affections are derived from it. This is an obvious overstatement of the role of reason/rational side of the human person in our understanding of how the human mind operates. One cannot liberate or disentangle rationality from affections, intuition, desires, fears, impulses, chemical processes in one’s brain. In other words, one cannot detach rationality from one’s concrete embodiment (physiologically and genetically speaking) or one’s cultural and moral starting point derived from one’s personal and social contexts. (Lacey, 2013) We should also ask the following critical questions: Aren’t there suprarational realities, events of intuitive participation, mystical experiences of sharing in transcendental realities that preclude or irreversibly influence our rational understanding of ourselves and the world? What about basic instincts and subconscious impulses or traumas?

Another element that we feel should be dealt with more in any treatment of what constitutes the human person is what we may call a meta-narrative framework. Such overarching framework provides meaning and structure to human cognitive perceptions, affective dispositions, and dedicatory self-declarations. We don’t just create this framework ourselves; we are born into it, i.e., into a certain language and culture and religion or a system of values, stories, symbols, and myths. This meta-narrative framework helps us grasp reality holistically and meaningfully. It gives us a hermeneutical vision of reality, interpretive glasses through which we see the world. When we attain a second-level discourse and start asking ourselves these “meta questions,” we start intentionally to challenge and modify our meta-narrative framework. There is a dynamic influence, a mutual interplay between the thinking self and his/her narrative framework. (Taylor, 1992; 2009) Language itself is a social and cultural phenomenon. In the human agent’s thinking, the ‘Self’ cannot liberate itself from the language that constituted it.

Another critical matter is the question of whether intellect, education/knowledge makes one truly a ‘wisery’ and thus a morally ‘better’ human person. Because of their highly cultivated veracity, philosophers should be most rational, most responsible, most virtuous, most “free” persons in society. Are they? This leads us, among other things, to the issue of freedom. Freedom is wishing that which is good (for me), not imposing one’s own will on the rest of the surrounding world. But how do we attain such freedom? Are we born free? Or are we born to become free by being liberated by some intrinsic truth that is woven into the reality of the world? Or should we lapse to religion or some version of ‘transcendence’-philosophy and speak of a more mystical version of the Truth? (See: Sokolowski, 2006; Mansini, 2002) These questions remain largely unanswered, even if they might be marginally addressed in Sokolowski’s work. Nevertheless, we find his treatment of phenomenological personalism stimulating and worthy of further reflection.

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